



OLD vs NEW in 2026

The UML-NC-NCP legacy parties face a formidable challenge from the alternative BRK alliance in March



Shristi Karki

The BRK (Balen-Rabi-Kulman) merger this week signified a generational shift in politics in the new year, but whether it will lead to a change in culture of patronage-driven strongman politics is looking doubtful.

Two 7-point deals this week brought together Energy Minister Kulman Ghising's UNP and Rabi Lamichhane's RSP, with Lamichhane remaining chair, and Ghising joining DP Aryal and Swarnim Wagle as vice-chair. And Kathmandu mayor Balen Shah has been promised prime ministership if the party wins a majority in the federal elections under the RSP banner. So far so good.

The merger was possible because the three men shared an agenda to represent GenZ aspirations and the necessity of not splitting the vote in facing the legacy parties.

"It is too early to predict whether or not the three new leaders can address the challenges of the nation," notes editor and political analyst Rajendra Dahal, "They have yet to prove how capable they are."

All three are ambitious politicians, and combined they represent a significant challenge to old parties in 2026 and beyond.

But are they really new? Political scientist Sucheta Pyakuryal does not think so: "We are seeing the same political course being charted by new political players, who are neck-deep in Machiavellian power-mongering and political horse trading, under the guise of

bringing alternative forces under one umbrella."

Lamichhane, recently released on bail from jail for defrauding cooperative depositors and under scrutiny for breaking out of prison during the September protests, has put his own prime ministerial aspiration on hold to hitch his wagon to the popular Kathmandu mayor. For Balen Shah, the prospect of leading not just Kathmandu but Nepal itself appears to have been the deciding factor in agreeing to the deal.

NEW DOGS, OLD TRICKS

News of the BRK alliance was initially greeted as a welcome generational change in politics that could finally break the decades-long Oli-Deuba-Dahal triumvirate. But there have been misgivings among those who see Balen-Rabi-Kulman already dividing up the spoils of their September movement.

Then the RSP's candidate list this week set off a digital firestorm. The proportional representation (PR) provision in the election designed to ensure inclusion of women and excluded groups, instead had celebrities, entrepreneurs, athletes. "Under the cover of diversity and inclusion, they have onboarded Nepal's rich and powerful elites – the 1%-- when the PR system was designed for those in the periphery whose inclusion and representation retain the democratic essence of this republic," says Pyakuryal.

Even so, and despite being a three-way marriage of convenience, the BRK alliance is set to challenge legacy parties. Lamichhane needs backing from Shah's followers and

Ghising's public goodwill, while Shah and Ghising both require a political platform.

But they will also carry each other's baggage. The shadow of the cooperatives scam and jailbreak hang over Lamichhane, Shah is known to be impulsive and erratic especially on social media, while Ghising did some iffy dealings while minister and head of Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA).

Shah and Lamichhane have much in common. Both campaigned on social media, pushing a populist anti-corruption agenda and against the governance failure of the three establishment parties — the same logic that drove the GenZ protests in September that escalated into violence and brought down the UML-NC coalition.

As former tv anchor, Lamichhane championed the underdog and has a considerable following. Balen Shah's no-holds-barred style of communication has made him popular, especially among digital natives. Ghising is credited with ending Nepal's prolonged power cuts as head of the Nepal Electricity Authority, and is regarded as a do-er.

Lamichhane has let go of his ambition and offered prime ministership to Shah. Ghising gave up leadership of his newly-formed UNP. All three will have significant pull with the 837,094 first-time voters in March.

The legacy parties are now galvanised for elections because of the Rabi-Balen-Kulman partnership, and contemplate an electoral alliance. They are relying on traditional vote banks among the rural electorate, and hoping against hope for internal rifts within the

BRK alliance before polls.

Ironically, Oli in the UML, Deuba in the NC and Dahal in the NCP all distrust rivals within their own parties more than each other. The NC's list has new faces, but is dominated by former ministers, family members, including children of current and former presidents, as well as spouses of ex ministers. The Nepali Communist Party has also opted to include all new faces on its list.

The UML has attempted to include younger candidates from a wider demographic this time, but topping the list are Oli supporters.

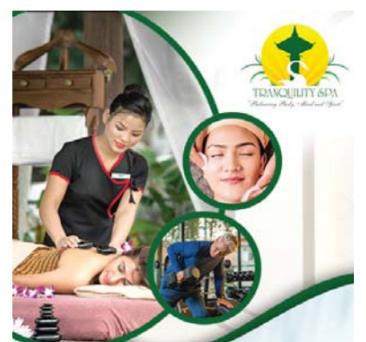
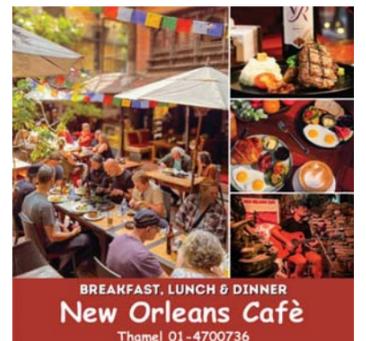
Concludes Pyakuryal: "What is worrisome is the old parties' corrupt syndicates and new parties' lack of principled politics and strong ideological bases. Even more disturbing is the rise of strongman politics and their overt reliance on those who already have money, clout and power. The template remains, only the actors have changed."

Not ever again

EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



PAGE 9





Not ever again

2026 marks 30 years after the start of the Maoist conflict, and 20 years since the ceasefire in 2006

Kunda Dixit

2026 marks the 20th anniversary of the Comprehensive Peace Accord that ended the Maoist conflict, and 30 years since the rebels launched their armed struggle.

Yet, two decades after it ended, there is almost no collective national memorialisation of a conflict that ended up killing 17,000 Nepalis. More than 1,330 people are still listed as missing. The perpetrators of heinous war crimes walk free in broad daylight — some have even served as ministers in government.

The transitional justice process, which was a part of the 2006 peace accord, is in limbo. History text books do not mention the war, an entire generation has grown up with no recollection or knowledge of the violence.

The goals for which so many lives were lost are now covered in the dust of history. It is a long list of promises not kept, pledges not honoured, sacrifices forgotten. The 2015 federal republican Constitution was the war's end-point. The monarchy was abolished, political devolution from Kathmandu to the seven provinces, and an inclusive, just society was promised.

But then it was Animal Farm all over again. Napoleon, Snowball and Squealer started resembling Farmer Jones until no one could tell them apart. Today, some ex-guerrillas still believe in the revolution, many have migrated to the Gulf or Malaysia, child soldiers now have children of their own, survivors and families of the victims struggle with their loss, but memories are fading. International support for human rights



years ago. Corruption became a given.

None of the promised revolutions since 1950 attained their ultimate aims, as Sudiksha Tuladhar's analysis in this edition (page 9) concludes. The Shahs were not that much better than the Ranas, and acceded to popular demands for change only to dismantle democracy. Young Nepalis took to the streets in 1980, 1990 and 2006 in pro-democracy movements, but rulers regressed and perpetuated the status quo.

RIPE FOR REVOLUTION

From 1996-2006 the Nepali people were held hostage by a war fought in their name. The Maoists used the borrowed and ill-fitting ideology of 'The People's War' waged by 'The People's Liberation Army'. The labels were tragically appropriate because it was the people who died and suffered.

Nepal had not seen armed conflict in its territory since the 1814-1816 Anglo-Nepal War. Since then, Nepalis have been fighting in other people's wars. But by the 1990s, Nepal was ripe for revolution because of the feudal ruling structure, the apathy and neglect of newly-elected parties that left millions of youth without jobs and opportunities. Public exasperation was building up.

Nepal went from absolute to

constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy and even endured the royal-military coup of 2005. But it did not make the rulers more accountable, they were mostly preoccupied with personal or partisan greed and ambition.

The same pattern was repeated following the 2017 election, after which Nepal had five coalition governments in six years. Serial prime ministers played promiscuous politics and recycled themselves over and over again.

Again, all it needed was a spark. That came on 8 September 2025. The slogans and demands, the outrage and impatience of the GenZ protesters were nearly identical to the young students who marched to the palace gates in 1980, 1990 and 2006. Some of those students went on to join the parties they were affiliated with, and are now themselves in their 50s and 60s.

They were all angry and young once. They may no longer be young, but some of them are still angry. Ever since 1990, the political parties which could not get their act together to spur investment and create jobs decided to encourage outmigration of youth. Thus, the rulers exported outrage, while they themselves played musical chairs, oblivious to the fate of the country.

After every half-revolution the new dispensation has emulated the despots they replaced, or thrown the baby out with the bathwater. The danger with the run-up to the March election and beyond is that we will repeat that mistake (page 1). Not everything old is bad, not everything new is good.

As the old and the new battle it out, let us learn from the Maoist conflict so that in 2026, the new will not start resembling the old.

Trending Online



People, naturally

by Kunda Dixit
Local communities in the buffer zones of Chitwan National Park play a vital role in conservation. Read the story, and interview with WWF president Adil Najam, on nepalitimes.com.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



Bhutan prisoner dies

by Nepali Times
Sha Bahadur Gurung was 30 years old when he was arrested for participating in a protest in 1990. He died aged 65 this month in Bhutan's Chamgang Central Prison. There are still 30 prisoners of conscience in Bhutan's jails. Many comments on this story were from Bhutan, denying state persecution of Lhotsampa.

Most popular on X

Not taking loyalty for granted

by Vishad Raj Onta
British Gurkha soldier Shankar Rai's book Triumph and Tears chronicles the 1986 Hawaii incident and the Falklands/Malvinas war. This could be a cautionary tale of how one person can ruin the lives of those involved. Read review on our website.

Most commented

From 'American-O' to Jumli

by Santosh Timalnsina
After being trained in Korea to be a barista, machine repair and roasting, Timalnsina returns to Nepal to lay the groundwork to export Nepal's specialty coffee to the international market. Follow us for the latest instalments of Diaspora Diaries. Story on page 4-5.

Most visited online page

Letters

BALEN-KULMAN-RABI

This partnership is not surprising, as alliances are by definition supposed to be mutually beneficial ('Kulman follows Balen to RSP', nepalitimes.com). They have said that their focus is on the country and citizens, which is appreciated. But, time will tell. Sadly, the major three parties had multiple alliances but focused mostly on corruption and cronies, which was shameful.

Bishow Parajuli

I'm worried about Birendra Basnet's Gatishil Loktantra Party. I'm wondering if they should also unite with RSP?

Seller Bahadur

This alliance looks as though it might break new ground in Nepali politics ('Old vs new in Nepal in 2026', nepalitimes.com).

David Seddon

Sadly, both Balen and Rabi are known to be anti-federalist. They would likely concentrate power again in Kathmandu, if they win.

Keith D Leslie

I hope this partnership between new forces works.

Ron Ranson

GURKHASIN HAWAII

The Gurkha are brave men to the last ('Not taking loyalty for granted', Vishad Raj Onta, #1291). I served as staff officer. He had no clue about leadership or basic people skills. I empathise with these guys.

Geoff Bone

The Hawaii incident was a completely prejudiced, biased

and unjust decision despite the laws and BGSi conditions. It was an arbitrary treatment towards innocent soldiers. It was not only discrimination but cruelty towards fellow human beings.

Manbir Limbu

Nepal's Gurkha soldiers are a very brave lot but unfortunately, they are fighting other people's wars.

Angu Tashi

Bhutia

The solitary dark spot in the otherwise legendary history of Gurkha soldiers is 1919 when they killed unarmed Sikhs when ordered by British General Dyer. Glad that Gurkha Soldiers are fighting to get their dues long overdue. They literally made German Nazis feel afraid of the khukri as they fought WWII with sheer ferocity

Binitt Datta

BHUTAN PRISONERS

When you are in someone's house and country, follow their rules and regulations and protocol ('Bhutan political prisoner dies in detention', nepalitimes.com). Bhutan is a great country and all people who follows the rules enjoy the benefits of his highness. That's it, don't make a fuss.

Abhishek Gurung

I heard from my parents, no one forcibly expelled anyone. Under the external influence, some evil intend instigated people to protest against the Monarch Government and adopted violent method like burning of schools, temples, government institution buildings, Bhutanese traditional clothes and killing of anyone disagreeing their ideology. They misunderstood the compassionate patience of the throne as a weakness.

Bikash Rai

Online Package



GENZ VOTERS

Listen to what some of Nepal's 850,000 first-time voters have to say about 5 March polls, and their overwhelming demand for better elected leaders so democracy can function better.



TAKING THE HIGH LINE

Highlining is akin to slacklining, which is essentially walking on a tightrope between two anchor points. Watch Roadies winner Saman Shrestha slacklining on our YouTube channel.

1,000 Words



LEARN FROM HIM: Prime Minister Sushila Karki finally got the old and new parties to commit to election on 5 March, and she is now approaching other forces that may have the potential or intention to disrupt polls. She made a symbolic gift of a Buddha image to Durga Prasai, the loan-defaulting tycoon who was once close to the UML-Maoists, but now wants to restore a Hindu monarchy.



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STAR ALLIANCE 

From 'American-O' to Jumli

A Korean returnee dreams of exporting Nepali speciality coffee to the international market



DIASPORA
DIARIES 77

This is the 77th episode of Diaspora Diaries, a Nepali Times series in collaboration with Migration Lab providing a platform to share experiences of living, working and studying abroad.

Santosh Timalina

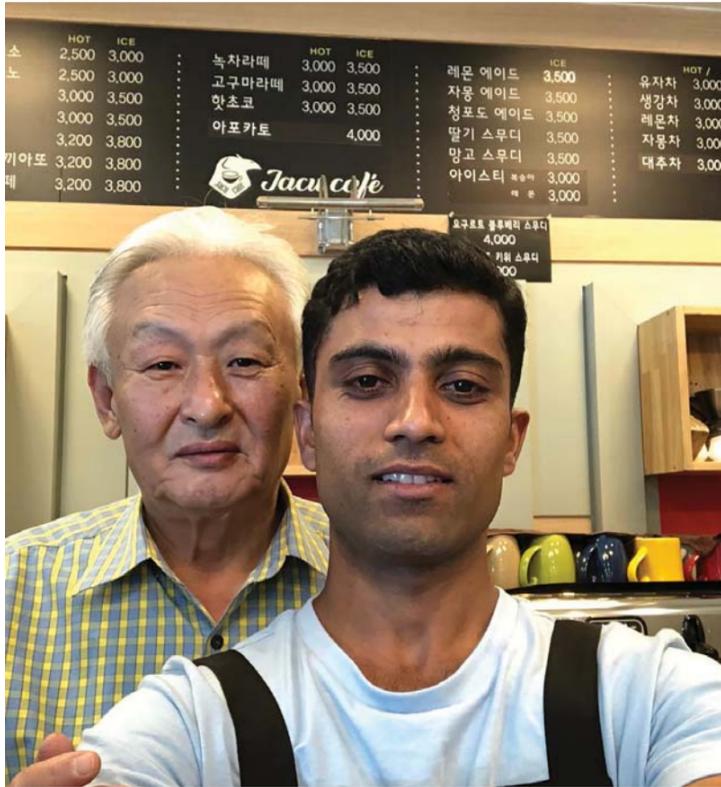
I was in Grade 3 when my father left for Saudi Arabia. Two decades later, I left my son a day after he was born to go to Korea.

He was five when I returned, and he just could not believe I was the person he spoke to on video calls. To convince him that it was indeed me, I had to call him on video from the other room.

My mother died when my father was in Saudi Arabia, and he could not return to Nepal immediately. My grandmother took in my two sisters and me.

My studies took a hit. I started working in a shoe shop, and wanted to start a shoe shop but my father did not support me. Perhaps he doubted my business sense.

I decided to prepare to migrate to Korea, and studied for the language exam. I was in the first



cohort under the G2G scheme. I could not be happier when I was matched with a Korean employer,

My first stint in Korea, however, was not what I expected. I had to change jobs multiple times, either because the company I worked for was unable to pay me, there was no work, or I had an accident. The odds just were not in my favour.

Even so, I managed to help pay for my sisters' weddings and had modest savings. But there was not much to show for it. Never again, I thought, as I said goodbye to Korea.

I came home, got married and started a mobile repair shop. It did not work out well, and I was soon headed back to Korea. I left a day after my son was born, this time I

was determined to make it work.

I was placed in a company that made golf balls. It paid well, but the job was just for money, I needed to do something more with my future that would help me stand on my own feet once I was back in Nepal.

ALL ABOUT COFFEE

I was intrigued by the three-in-one instant coffee sachets in Korea that had coffee, milk and sugar. Back in Kaski, our cooperative grew coffee that either went to waste or fetched very low prices.

I saw great business prospect in turning the beans into coffee sachets, and started exploring this. That was my mission: to make instant coffee packets widely available in Nepal. It was just a matter of understanding the process so I went to a migrant resource centre in Korea to inquire about where I could learn this.

I was advised to take barista classes, and I found out that sachet coffee is actually not healthy and I should instead learn about fresh brewed coffee.

I spent all my free time learning about coffee. I trained as a barista, machine repair and roasting. I had to rely on the generosity of Koreans willing to take a chance on me.

When the pandemic hit, we were granted a one-year visa extension, and I took it as an opportunity to learn coffee machine repairs which had prospects in Pokhara because people had to rely on Kathmandu.

I moved to a training company and worked just enough to maintain my legal status. I did not take overtime shifts. Even my roommates barely saw me because I used to come home long after our duty hours from my coffee training. I also needed actual job experience so I asked my trainer to let me shadow him at work.

I flew back to Nepal with a suitcase full of coffee machine parts. I have started a coffee shop called Jumli, and provide machine repair services and have also started growing my own coffee.

The idea is to be a one stop shop for all players in the coffee industry, whether it is farmers or coffee shop owners who need Nepal-grown coffee or machine repair services or coffee lovers.

It is not always easy being an entrepreneur in Nepal. Sometimes, when I am on shaky ground, I close my eyes and talk to my mother in my head for clarity. Some of these conversations are replays of the things she told me when I was growing up. I didn't take them seriously then, but now they offer important nuggets of wisdom about life, society, and how to navigate difficult times.

I am now laying the groundwork to one day export Nepal's specialty coffee to the international market, meeting global standards of quality. Programs like the Returnee Innovators for Nepal (RIN) help in equipping you with the skills to better pitch your business and give exposure and networks. 🇳🇵

NMB BANK एनएमबी बैंक



Korala-Rasuwa

Trade worth Rs11 billion has passed through the Customs Office at the Korala border checkpoint with China since 30 September. Most of this was imported from China, including 2,074 electric vehicles, while exports were mostly handicrafts. Trade through the Rasuwagadi border point has resumed after the border bridge was swept away by floods in July. The Chinese have built a temporary bridge.

Top TikTok searches

TikTok shared the top words searched by Nepalis on the platform, which show a strong interest in travel and current news. The most searched celebrities included Priyanka Karki and Rajesh Hamal, while the most searched sportspeople included Samba and Dipendra Singh Airee. Most searched places included Mustang and Manang.

Yamaha Otaku

Yamaha co-sponsored Otaku Jatra 2025, an Anime, cosplay and pop culture convention held at The Plaza on December 27. Yamaha showcased their MT-15 street bike, holding a stunt show and a ride-out from the Yamaha Naxal Showroom to the venue.



Tea, Coffee exports

Nepal exported tea and coffee worth Rs4 billion in the first five months of this fiscal year. However, tea farmers are critical of the government's pause on export subsidies, pointing out that these incentives played a key role in the industry's growth.



IME in Kosi

Global IME Bank is working with the DAI-Udaya Project to help small and micro businesses in Kosi Province find capital. Eligible businesses will be able to get convenient loans from all IME branches in the province. The DAI-Udaya Project is a bilateral initiative that involves the GoN and Switzerland.

EC bans AI

The Election Commission has issued an updated and expanded code of conduct that bans the use of Artificial Intelligence to influence voters using disinformation, defamation, deep fakes, and hate speech. The code also prohibits coordinated online activities such as reposting, commenting, tagging, live streaming, or mentioning content with the intent to mislead voters. Fake social media accounts are also not allowed.

Hyundai discounts

Customers can get discounts of up to Rs600,000, and a year's worth of insurance and road tax on cars under the Hyundai Winter Delight scheme. All Hyundai cars come with a three year warranty, an eight-year battery guarantee, and six years of free servicing.

Samsung Innovation

Samsung Innovation Campus Nepal has completed another batch of its AI and Big Data program, which aims to make students more employable by training them in in-demand technologies and skills and in essential soft skills. The program ended in a certificate distribution ceremony at Pulchok Campus, and a new batch has begun training. Participants must have basic programming knowledge.

Dongfeng execs

Wang Long, chairman of China's Dongfeng Motor Industry Import & Export Company, led a delegation to Nepal on an official inspection and exchange visit. The visit focused on reviewing Dongfeng's market performance, operational setup, and overall presence in Nepal. The delegation also personally handed over Nammi cars to new customers.

Surya golf tourney

The Surya Nepal Golf tour has begun at the Gokarna Golf Club. A total of 63 players, 37 pros and 26 amateurs, are taking part. The top 18 pros and amateurs will make it to the final two rounds. The event has cash prizes of Rs1,050,000.



Cardamom export

Large cardamom worth Rs5.53 billion has been exported in the first five months of the current fiscal year, an increase of 60% over the previous period. Almost all exports are India-bound, after which they are re-exported to Pakistan and the Gulf. Cardamom traders have been lobbying the government to negotiate with Pakistan to reduce export taxes on the spice. They are also looking for ways to transport the product directly to Pakistan or Bangladesh.



Myagdi copper

MS Dongyi Minerals Pvt Ltd, with approval from the Department of Mines and Geology, has begun studying six sites near Machhim village in Myagdi to see if inactive copper mines can be revived. A team of geologists is assessing copper content, and an access road has been built to connect the mine to the main road. Copper was mined until 1971 but stopped because of high taxes.

Hulas goes solar

Hulas Steel has installed solar power at its factory in Simara, leveraging a government-supported clean energy program. The company has also transitioned some of its factory operations from diesel to electricity.

Tourism arrivals

Nearly 1.2 million tourists visited Nepal in 2025, most of them from India, attaining pre-pandemic level for arrivals and 10% up from the previous year. Also, 1.543 million Nepalis travelled abroad in 2025, while just over 900,000 Nepalis returned to the country.

Mushroom mushrooms

Nepal's mushroom harvests have made it self-sufficient in the food, and generates an annual turnover of Rs20 billion, with about 35,000 farmers producing nearly 50,000 tons. Varieties include oyster, button, shiitake, and king oyster.

With love from Korea

A Korean employer helping returnee Nepalis set up their businesses and in turn create jobs for others

In 2025, Nepali Times featured many Korea returnees in its Diaspora Diaries series, but what about the other side? Who are the employers hiring Nepali workers? Jonga Sun is an employer under the Korean government's Employer Permit Scheme (EPS) who hires Nepali workers in his livestock businesses. We interviewed him on a recent visit to Nepal, and his responses were translated by Dip Kirati, a Nepali who has returned from Korea.

Nepali Times: What is your role as an EPS employer in Korea?

Jonga Sun: I have worked in livestock for 30 years and currently operate two parent chicken farms, two parent duck farms and three pig farms in Korea. I come from a very humble background. I did not go hungry during my childhood, but my parents' generation sometimes survived just on water.

Korea was developing rapidly, and living standards were improving, which was reflected in protein intake. When people start earning more, the demand for meat goes up. I was lucky to get into this business just at the right time. Korean livestock farmers are doing better than others in the agriculture sector.

I did not know about the EPS scheme, or that I could hire workers from Nepal. I used to have farmhands from Vietnam and Thailand. The first group of Nepali workers I hired was already working in Korea at a farm that I took over. But for the last ten years, I have been directly recruiting Nepalis through the EPS scheme and have hired 20 workers from Nepal in the last decade.

What brings you to Nepal this time?

The first time I was here in 2019 was for market research. In South Korea, broiler chickens usually weigh 1.5 to 1.8 kg and there was discussion about raising bigger chickens. Chicken in Nepal weigh 2-3kg and



MEATY JOB: Nepali guest workers with Jonga Sun (centre, left) at his livestock farm in Korea. On a recent visit to Nepal, Jonga Sun (at right, right) visited a meat shop opened by another Korea returnee Prabin Shrestha.

I wanted to explore this further. At that time, I met some EPS returnees including those who had worked on my farm and found they either did not have a job, or were waiting to migrate again despite the skills, experience and money they came back with. It pained me to see the state of some Korea returnees, including my own former workers.

When Nepalis come to Korea, they are young and without adequate experience. They have language skills, but it would also be good if they had some basic knowledge about the work they will be doing. For employers, transitions would be easier if workers are more knowledgeable about their work and for workers, they would not just feel more prepared about their overseas stint but would be able to set proper visions and goals for themselves.

I want to help establish returnees as entrepreneurs so they don't have to stay idle or re-migrate to Korea or elsewhere,

which I have seen in many cases although I have also met many returnees who are running successful ventures. I am sure more companies would be willing to support initiatives to help Nepali workers who have returned from Korea thrive as entrepreneurs.

What is the reason for your continued engagement in Nepal?

My biggest priority is to help establish returnees in Nepal. Even if I managed to help 10 Korea returnee entrepreneurs in Nepal, I would be happy. I want to give back by engaging with Nepalis who have returned from Korea, including those who have worked in my farm for years.

It would be meaningful if workers who have contributed to the Korean economy and to their employers also become entrepreneurs and job providers themselves in Nepal. If they can translate the knowledge, finances and experience that they get in Korea and we

can play a hand to enable that, it would make me happy.

What key lessons can Nepal draw from South Korea's labour migration model?

Korea was very poor in the past. Many Koreans were migrant workers in West Germany in nursing and mining. Many went to Saudi Arabia. They did not just send back money, many returned to use their technical know-how, finances and skills in our economy, including the manufacturing sector which became the backbone of Korea's economy.

Nepal too relies heavily on migrants and remittances. But it is sad that many Nepali returnees want to re-migrate even after spending almost a decade in Korea with their savings and experience. The Nepal government needs to change this and create the environment to provide opportunities to retain them. 🇳🇵




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Sonia Awale

YALA

New photobook is a must-have guide for visitors to Lalitpur, and also for residents

As someone born and raised in Patan, I knew that the city was rich in art, architecture and intangible heritage. But I never realised just how rich, and how little I knew about its hidden treasures until this book.

Yala Mhasika/Exploring Lalitpur/Lalitpurko Chinari is published by the Lalitpur Chamber of Commerce & Industry and introduces the city to the world, as well as to its own inhabitants.

Lalitpur is popularly known as Patan, probably because of the pastures for livestock in its outskirts. Its original name in Nepal Bhasa is Yala, and is a blend of urban and rural, old and new.

Like other kingdoms in the valley of Swoniga, the dense urban cluster of houses, temples, monasteries were situated along the higher ground, while the farmlands were on the slopes

leading to the rivers below. This unique townscape combined an urban lifestyle within a distinctly agriculture-based rural setting.

The fertile soil, replenished by organic nutrients washed down from the streets above, as well as Kathmandu's location on the ancient trade route between India and Tibet, provided the Valley's kingdoms with prosperity – and thus the flourishing of art and culture over centuries.

Most of Yala's residents were farmers, traders, or artisans. Chinese visitors who came to Nepal in the 6th century saw that there were more traders than farmers, and more temples than houses. An entire street is inhabited by the descendants of Lhasa traders. Arniko is supposed to have been born in Yala.

Nepal exported goods and even minted coins for Tibet, and had a virtual monopoly of the major trans-Himalayan trade routes. This prosperity was reflected in

monuments and shrines like the Kwa Baha Golden Temple.

More so than the other three kingdoms of Swoniga, architecture flourished in Yala making it the centre for metal, stone and wood craft. The name Lalitpur means 'city of fine art' but with its sense of community, it might as well be a city of fine living.

Legend also has it that the name Lalitpur comes from a farmer called Lalit who helped bring the rain god Karunamaya from Assam when the Valley was suffering a prolonged drought. Lalit's shoulder beam stands to this day in Jhatapol. Disasters, invasion and epidemics (see page 10-11) were a recurring theme in Patan.

The book was put together by the heritage expert team of Anil Chitrakar and Roshia Chitrakar and provides a socio-economic and political history of Patan – how it was always food surplus, thanks to sustainable farming until recently.

Ground and drone images by





PHOTOS: VENTURE NEPAL



Photo Venture Nepal in the book give us a rare new perspective on Patan. There is an entire chapter on the chariot festival of Karunamaya (Machhindranath), a community-managed festival with Barahi carpenters assembling the woodwork, vine engineers Yamva weaving rope and rattan for the 25m tall chariot, and Ghaku drivers controlling the speed and brakes as the structure rolls through narrow streets in the annual festival.

WALKING, WORSHIPPING
The book can help in exploring Patan along five routes starting in Patan Dhoka, Pulchok, Shankhamul, Mahaboudha and Lagankhel with maps and details of the baha and bahil, shrines, ponds, open spaces, dhyochenn, courtyards and phalcha along the way. Because of its coffee-table size and heft, however, the guidebook is not practical to carry around. And despite detailed descriptions of the past and



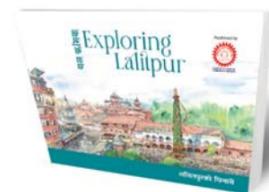
present of each site, readers are left wanting to know more about those places. It is proof of Patan's vast treasures that even this book barely scratches the surface. Some of the lesser-known must-visit sites include Patukodom which is all that remains of a palace of the original Kirat inhabitants of Patan. An archaeological dig here would surely unearth hitherto unknown facets of pre-Newa Patan. Then there are the slightly out of the way shrines like Mahabouha, a replica of a temple in Bodhgaya which houses 3,341 terracotta Buddhas with 90 big statues and which took 35 years and four generations to complete. In a recent Patan by Night heritage walk, we learnt that Pim Bahal was the labour of love of a lakhe demon (now popularised as masked dancer) who had fallen for a local girl, and he dug the pond so she would not have to walk to a faraway spout to collect water. Nearby is the Charumati Chaitya, built by the daughter of Emperor Ashoka when she visited the Valley in the 3rd century BCE to spread Buddhism in Nepal.

Interestingly, if Kathmandu is a city of temples, Patan is the centre of monasteries which represent a unique Tantric melding of Buddhist and Hindu forms. Examples are: the Tadham Cuka with relocated Licchavi-era chaityas symbolic of the four major events in Buddha's life, Ajima of Haugal Tole which is the oldest stone scripture in Nepal with the Gaja Laxmi in Chyusal, and Bignantak Ganesa temple which is a manifestation of Shiva mingled with Vajrayana Buddhism.

Besides spatial descriptions, the book also explains the temporal by curating a detailed cultural calendar of Lalitpur with dates and places of jatra, rituals, devotional dances and festivals that weave the agricultural cycle with the zodiac.

The very last chapter is dedicated to water and nature, what sustains lives and civilisations, and how Lalitpur continues to be the city it is because of the water supply system our ancestors left behind which function still, despite encroachment and pollution.

'In the history of the world cities have been built, they thrived for some time and then became archaeological sites because they were not able to maintain the quality of air, water, and its soil,' the authors write. 'This led these cities to depopulate and ultimately die and are only referred to in history books. Lalitpur is not going to make the same mistake.'



Yala Mhasika/Exploring Lalitpur/Lalitpurko Chinari
Lalitpur Chamber of Commerce & Industry, 2025 330 pages Rs5,000

Save Panauti's murals

Priceless wall paintings in the temples of this ancient town need urgent restoration

One of the few Newa towns situated outside Kathmandu Valley, Panauti still evokes the feeling of a place frozen in time.

Largely untouched by haphazard urbanisation, this town 32km east of Kathmandu used to be a kingdom revered for the sacred confluence of the Punyamati and Rosi rivers.

The Bramhayani temple is the site of a 12 yearly Makar Mela which is attended by devotees from as far away as India.

Panauti's crumbling monuments were restored in the 1990s by the French government. Temples, resting places, traditional homes were rebuilt and locals trained to revive their craft. Panauti and France marked 50 years of cooperation in September.

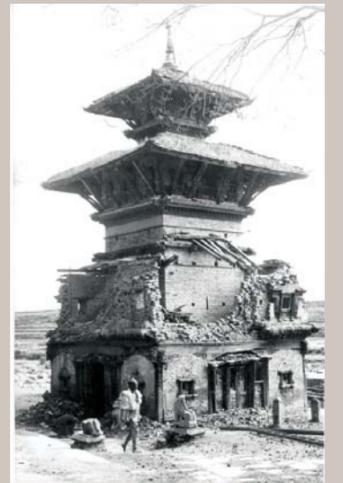
However, the priceless murals on the temple walls are fading and need urgent restitution. Now, these crumbling wall paintings are meticulously documented in the Wall Paintings of Panauti and Their Context.

encountering wall paintings inside Bramhayani temple which were deteriorated by smoke, leaky roof, dust, vermilion, sprinkles of animal blood and lack of maintenance. The team led by chemist Bhimvar Singh Thapa treated the wall paintings and some of the details were recovered including the paintings of Astamatrika and Asta Bhairav on the east, west and southern walls.

PAINTINGS ARE NOT VISIBLE

The murals were painted during the reign of the last Malla King of Bhaktapur Ranjit Malla and Queen Viswalaxmi Devi 300 years ago. But 40 years after the restoration, Pradhan notes that the murals are again in poor condition: 'The paintings are not visible, the plaster is severely damaged and the surface has peeled off ... electrical wires hang haphazardly inside the temple.'

The second lot of murals at Ghat Sattal are thought to have been commissioned during the late Malla period or the beginning



In his foreword, French researcher Gérard Toffin writes about some of the earliest wall paintings from the Malla period in Kathmandu, including a 17th century mural depicting the procession of Rato Machhindranath which has since been restored.

Several other pieces still exist but in a pitiful state, defaced by scratches. 'They were painted on a plaster coating made of soil, husks, or limestone, which were applied to the bricks making up the walls,' Toffin notes.

The book delves into the cult of Asta Matrika among Newa of all castes and classes, the first of which is Bramhayani. These all-pervading deities are linked to Shaktism which focuses on the importance of the female principle and together, combine the forces of life, sex and fertility with that of death and eros. The deities are painted on the wall, carved on the stone or moulded into metallic statues.

Riddhi Baba Pradhan, former director general of the Department of Archaeology who oversaw the restoration of Panauti 30 years ago, writes that a colourful wall painting depicting Buddha's past life at the Chabahil Chaitya built or restored during the reign of Lichhavi king Vrisedev in the 3rd century might be the earliest mural in Nepal.

As for Panauti, a fragment from a 400-year-old scroll which illustrates a scene of Triveni Ghat with Dalinchok Hill in the background is likely the oldest. But that relic is currently at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in the United States.

Pradhan recalls first

of the Shah dynasty. Exterior walls depict incarnations of Lord Vishnu as well as Sesh Narayan, Ganesh, a scene of Samundra Manthan, of angels Maya, Moha, Ganga. Their attributes, dresses, ornaments, facial expressions, body postures are all skilfully represented but in a deteriorated condition.

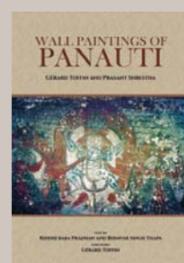
The wall paintings of Bramhayani Dyochhen are 90% degraded even though they were restored and repaired 40 years ago by the Panauti Integrated Project. Compared to other artefacts, wall paintings are more delicate to external factors, and if not preserved an important part of Nepal's heritage will be lost.

Furthermore, most of the wall paintings in Nepal are temperas, and not frescos. Tempera is painted with water-soluble mineral or vegetable pigments fixed with glue on the cow dung clay plaster on the brick walls.

While Nepal's focus has been on the repatriation of stolen artefacts from abroad, religious and cultural objects within the country like the Panauti murals need urgent attention.

This slim publication by Panauti Municipality is an important call to begin the work before it is too late.

Sonia Awale



Wall Paintings of Panauti and Their Context
Gérard Toffin and Prashant Shrestha
Text by Riddhi Baba Pradhan and Bhimvar Singh Thapa
Panauti Municipality, 2025
60 pages



Events



Taragaon Winter Camp

Taragaon Next is set to host a creative winter camp for students in grades 4 to 8, featuring mask painting, pottery, and storytelling sessions.

4-7 January, 10am-4pm, Tickets: Rs6,000, Taragaon Next

Weaving Workshop

Learn traditional pine needle weaving in a calm, beginner-friendly workshop at Creative Hub. Enjoy a relaxed, creative Saturday.

3 January, 12pm onwards, Tickets: Rs500, Creative Hub, Batika Tole



Patan by Night

As Patan sleeps, gods awaken, temples and stupas whisper, and history comes alive. Join the Night Walking Tour of the city and walk through these ancient streets. Contact patan.by.night@gmail.com for details.

8pm to midnight, upon request, maximum 10 in a group, +977 9813176191 (WhatsApp)

Writing the Bagmati

A three-day speculative writing workshop that invites participants to explore the Bagmati river as a central character in stories of environment, climate, and memory. Selected works will be published in an environmental fiction anthology.

2-4 January, 11am-2pm, Rs1,000, Bagmati river sites

Art exhibition

A solo exhibition by Suchin Shrestha exploring the human figure and interiority through contemporary visual language. The works reflect the nuanced intersections of thought, desire, and presence.

Until 10 January, 11am-5pm, Patan Wing, Nakabahil



Trail Running Workshop

A trail running workshop focused on technique and practical learning, held on the trails of Hattiban and facilitated by Coach Ramesh Sunuwar. Register via Facebook events.

3 January, Hattiban Resort, Pharping

Bhatti Tales

In James Dhakal's first original play Bhatti Tales, a local watering hole is a microcosm of Nepali society. Catch some shows.

Till 17 January, 5pm (except Tuesdays) and Saturday matinee at 1pm, Sadhana Ghar Theatre, Oscar College of Film Studies



Music

Chepong Antim Bhet

For death metal fans: Chepong, Antim Graham, and Six Coffins take the stage this Saturday afternoon. Get tickets at k garira?

3 January, 3pm onwards, Rs666, Purple Haze, Thamel

KJC Winter Camp

Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory's week-long Winter Camp 2026 for children aged 6-12 combines music, art, movement, and mindfulness, with interactive sessions and a final performance. Reach out to KJC to register.

4-14 January, 10am-4pm, Rs12,000, KJC Chabahil



Cobweb

Check out the music video for Cobweb's newest song followed by an exclusive performance from the band.

17 January, 5pm onwards, Rs1,299, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

Karaoke & Open mic

Ladies, get together with friends, get some drinks and sing your heart out at Karaoke & Open mic nights every Wednesday.

Wednesdays, Beers N' Cheers, Jhamsikhel



Goodboys

English house music duo Goodboys will be in Nepal to play at LOD next week, with supporting acts including Suren, Anish, Nadz, Saroj, Aavi, and Aditya.

9 January, LOD Thamel



Getaway



Hotel Annapurna View

Situated at 1,600m atop Sarangkot, this boutique hotel offers breathtaking views of the snow-capped mountains and Phewa Lake. Catch a glimpse of the panoramic scene of the Annapurnas in the dining area.

Sarangkot, Pokhara (01) 443566

Aloft staycation

Have a joyful, cosy, and relaxing staycation at Aloft Kathmandu Thamel this holiday season. Check out discounts and other perks under the exclusive offer.

Till 15 January, Rs11,000 (Single occupancy) / Rs12,000 (Double occupancy), Aloft Kathmandu Thamel (01) 5252000



Sapana Village Resort

Experience the rich Tharu and Chepong culture, marvel at the beauty of the lush national park, witness elephants lumbering through the forests and getaway to the heart of Sauraha.

Sauraha, Chitwan (56) 580308

Mount Princess

Surrounded by mountains and forestry, Mount Princess is a haven for city-dwellers. Spend the morning sipping a warm cup of Nepali tea while taking in the breathtaking views.

Dhulikhel (01) 490616

Ramada by Wyndham

Ramada Hotel boasts a fusion of Local Newari and Himalayan cultures as well as luxury modern amenities. Relax by the infinity pool, take a dip in the jacuzzi and step into the sauna room for a day away from the Kathmandu hustle.

Dhumbarahi (01) 4377298

Weekend Weather



Cold and Cloudy

A strong westerly front is sweeping into the western Himalaya and will bring cloud cover and a dip in the maximum temperature in Kathmandu. There may be localised light drizzles in the mid-mountains, with snow flurries at higher elevations. The intensity and duration of the dense ground fog that has blanketed the Tarai for the past week (left) may be reduced, bringing relief. People have been burning dung and straw to warm themselves, which has worsened air quality.



Our Pick



A 2025 American supernatural horror film follows Todd, a young man suffering from a chronic lung disease who moves to his late grandfather's home in the woods with his beloved dog, a Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever named Indy. Todd's sister, Vera, believes the house is haunted and contributed to their grandfather's death there. Indy immediately senses a malevolent presence in the home, threatening the well being of his human companion. Stars Indy (in the leading role as himself), Shane Jensen, Arielle Friedman and Larry Fessenden. Critical and commercial success, Good Boy is making headlines with Indy shortlisted in the Best Performance in Horror or Suspense category at Astra Film Awards—making him the first animal in history to be nominated in a bracket only occupied by human actors previously.



Dining

Evoke Café & Bistro

Evoke is the doorway into a space that will induce smells, colors, sounds and shapes of your mind's world. Try out their pita bread, baguette or multigrain sandwiches, that all come with homemade fries and a salad on side.

Jhamsikhel, 985111051

Buingal

A multi-cuisine restaurant and bar, great for a casual get-together with relatives and friends. The vegetarian sekuwa is finger-licking good.

Maitidevi (01) 4421393



Attic

Food meets ambiance at Attic. Enjoy the signature Royal Aloo, Schezwan Chicken, Bacon Potato Rolls and more.

Gyaneshwor (01) 4517843

The Yard

With their use of organic ingredients, smashing flavours and great presentation, a meal at The Yard is always one that you will never forget.

Sanepa (01) 5532965



Kairos Cafe

With a customisable breakfast, variety of juicy burgers and an assortment of Italian, Spanish and English cuisine, Kairos Cafe is a must for foodies. Its rustic, minimalistic setting also provides an ideal background for food photography.

Jawalakhel, 9813493902

सामाजिक सञ्जाल प्रयोगमा सचेतता अपनाऔं

- सामाजिक सञ्जालमा अपरिचित व्यक्तिको साथी बन्ने अनुरोधलाई विश्वस्त भएर मात्र प्रतिक्रिया जनाऔं ।
- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिड्डा पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपरौं ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड



1960
King Mahendra's coup, jails B P Koirala and launches the partyless Panchayat system



1979
Student protests for democracy, King Birendra announces referendum



1990
People's Movement I



1996
Maoists launch armed struggle



2000
Royal Massacre



2025
GenZ protests

2022
Second elections under federal Constitution



2017
First 3-tier election under federal system

2015
Madhes Movement, New Constitution promulgated



2008
Monarchy is abolished

2006
Comprehensive Peace Accord and Parliament restored



2005
King Gyanendra's military-backed coup

Nepal's incomplete revolutions

Political and democratic movements of the past decades have all fallen short of citizen's expectations

Sudiksha Tuladhar

For daring to demand democracy, the Rana regime hanged activist Shukra Raj Shastri at midnight on 24 January 1941 by the side of the road at Teku. Across town in Siphel, Dharma Bhakta Mathema was also hanged. Four days later, Dasrath Chand and Gangalal Shrestha were executed by firing squad.

These four young revolutionaries were members of the underground Nepal Praja Parishad that led the anti-Rana revolution with plans to assassinate key figures of the dynasty.

The four martyrs sacrificed their lives for an unfulfilled cause. Monuments were put up in their honour (Shahid Gate) and their names glorified by the Shah monarchy that itself went on to ban political parties and persecute democracy activists.

In 1950, the newly-formed Nepal National Congress launched an armed uprising against Rana rule after King Tribhuvan sought refuge at the Indian embassy to flee from the Rana regime. In 1951, the Ranas, Nepali Congress and King Tribhuvan signed a tripartite agreement that brought an end to 104 years of Rana rule.

Thus began contemporary Nepal's cycles of unfinished revolutions.

Some 75 years later, on a sunny September morning, Nepal's young and hopeful took to the streets demanding an end to the nation's corrupt polity, envisioning a better democracy. They organised through digital platforms, played songs, danced, and chanted slogans.

A few hours later, commandos fired on the protesters, massacring dozens. Over 8 and 9 September 2025, the government was overthrown, constitutional bodies were literally reduced to ashes, and 74 Nepalis were martyred.

Nepal's periodic revolutions have been ignited by anger against rulers, they have begun with great promise, spread with enthusiastic popular support despite rulers trying to crush them — but ultimately they have always fallen short of the expectations of citizens demanding reform.

Through decades of dissent, Nepal's periodic revolutions have remained incomplete, with the nation caught up in a cyclical search for stability.



AJAY JOSHI / A PEOPLE WAR

In 1960, king Mahendra staged a coup and overthrew an elected government led by prime minister B P Koirala -- a royal revolution against democracy. Mahendra is reported to have famously said to Koirala: "Nepal is not big enough for the two of us."

For the next 30 years Nepal resembled a one-party state under the absolute monarchy of the Panchayat. Elected leaders languished in jail or exile, political parties were banned, and the press controlled. This was the most frigid period of the Cold War, with Nepal's neighbours India and China at war. Geopolitics was bound to have an impact.

"After the 1816 Sugauli Treaty with British India, external forces magnified internal power struggles as outsiders played divide and rule," explains editor and political analyst Rajendra Dahal. "Movements did not reach a logical conclusion because domestic politicians were forced to compromise."

Indeed, the departure of the British from India in 1947 meant that the days of the Anglophile Rana regime were numbered. Successive prime ministers sought patronage in Delhi, and the

monarchy tried to counterbalance it with a policy of equidistance with China. The neighbours showed a keen strategic interest in Nepal's domestic politics.

"The Panchayat system did not deliver what it promised," says Santosh Sharma Poudel of Nepal Institute of Policy and Research. "Nepalis suffered administrative and governance failure, politics was centralised in Kathmandu, leaving out the rest of Nepal."

With mainstream political parties and leaders were underground between 1961 till 1990, student activists became proxies for political parties. As pressure for change grew, a student-led pro-democracy movement spread across Nepal in 1979. In response, King Birendra announced a referendum to allow Nepalis to choose between the status quo and a 'reformed' Panchayat system.

The Panchayat won by a slim margin with questions about the legitimacy of the plebiscite. The reforms never materialised and it would be another decade before street anger boiled over again.

As the People's Movement for democracy spread, king Birendra again relented, unbanning political parties and Nepal became a

constitutional monarchy.

Inspired by Mao Zedong, a faction of Nepal's Communists felt that western-style parliamentary democracy was too slow to end a feudalist monarchy. They launched an armed struggle in 1996, and the war lasted ten years (editorial, page 2).

"If the democratic government post-1990 had performed better, and brought real reform, the Maoists would not have a reason to launch a revolution," says Poudel.

After nearly a decade of bloodshed that left 17,000 dead and thousands still missing, the Maoists joined forces with the democratic parties that they had been fighting, to pressure king Gyanendra through street protests in 2006 to restore democracy.

In 2008, an elected Constituent Assembly abolished the monarchy. Recalls Rajendra Dahal: "The second people's movement did not aim to abolish the monarchy. In fact, the reinstated parliament even granted equal rights for royal daughters to be crowned queen. But eventually, the monarchy no longer fit the political framework that the parties envisioned."

It took two elections over the next eight years to draft a

new Constitution that reflected Nepal's socio-cultural and geographic diversity and met the demands of the Maoists. The new federal Constitution was finally promulgated in 2015, but failed to satisfy India and the aspirations of the Madhes communities for autonomy. The state's effort to crush the Madhes movement cost 45 lives.

The promise of the new Constitution was squandered over the next decade with rotating leadership of the NC, UML and the Maoists — all of whom had forgotten the sacrifices made in the name of revolution. Cronyism and corruption was the order of the day. And it was this never-ending cycle of political opportunism and malgovernance that brought Nepal's youth to the streets on 8 September.

BRK ALLIANCE

"The socio-political change sought in all these movements never matched the people's expectations, because the central issue of clean and efficient government never materialised," says Poudel.

The post-September political landscape has injected new personalities and alliances still relatively new to politics, as evidenced by the new electoral partnership of the BRK — Balen Shah, Rabi Lamichhane, and Kulman Ghising (page 1).

These leaders are not without flaws, but they have become the effective flag-bearers of the GenZ movement, hoping to represent Nepalis disillusioned by decades of democratic decay. The March election will pit them against the legacy parties.

There is already criticism that BRK is behaving just like male-dominated opportunists of old parties. The troika is resembling the triumvirate of Oli, Deuba and Dahal and its culture of patronage and quid-pro-quo power-sharing between alpha males.

Will this also be another unfinished revolution? Says political scientist Sucheta Pyakuryal: "The revolt should have led to a transformation in Nepal's political ecosystem, but that did not happen. Instead, we now have new players hiding behind a democratic facade to sound 'equitable' and 'accountable' while chauvinism, cronyism, and nepotism continue." 🇳🇵

Life in a time of cholera

The history of Kathmandu's past epidemics is the story of power, disease, and dependency

Ajaya Dixit

From stone spouts to cast-iron mains, Nepal's water system and its struggle to provide safe drinking water tells a larger story of power, disease, dependency — and lessons for the future.

From 1823 to 1891, the Nepali state made just two notable interventions in Kathmandu's drinking water system. The first: Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa more than 200 years ago commissioned a stone pout (hiti) to tap groundwater within the valley's traditional supply system.

The second came nearly 70 years later with Nepal's first industrial-era water system: the Bir Water Works in 1891 under Prime Minister Bir Shumsher Rana.

Linking these two milestones was cholera. From the 19th century on there were seven global cholera pandemics. Originating in Asia, the disease reached Europe and the Americas, the *Vibrio cholera* bacillus bred in poor sanitation wherever it found it.

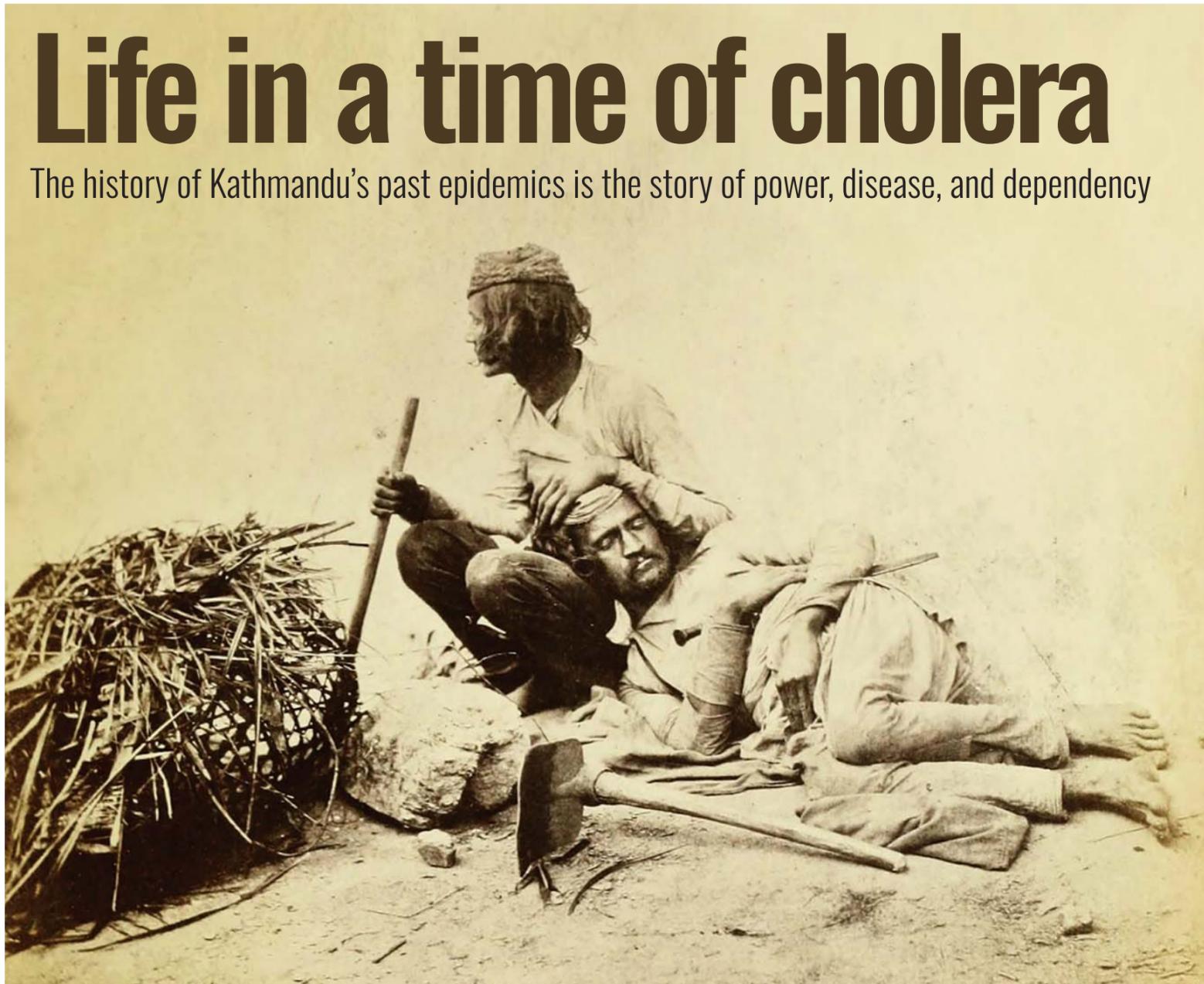
The first wave erupted in 1817, followed by others in 1829, 1852, 1863, 1881, 1889 and, finally, in 1961, the seventh pandemic which still lingers. London, the epicentre of the Industrial Revolution, was repeatedly stricken.

In Britain, 'miasma' foul air was blamed. In Nepal, cholera was seen as divine damnation. By the late 19th century, as Nepal's relationship with Britain deepened, the Bir Water Works was inaugurated in 1891 as a defence against cholera.

Whether cholera also shaped Bhimsen Thapa's decision in 1823 is less clear. Contemporary records note the commissioning of Sundhara, but do not refer to the cholera epidemic at the time. The silence itself is telling: Nepal's elites were ruling in the shadow of the disease.

Bhimsen Thapa first resided in Thapathali Palace, which was built in 1802 by Nain Singh Thapa, father of Mathabarsingh Thapa, who would briefly become prime minister in the 1840s. In 1806, Bhimsen Thapa moved to Bagh Darbar, a new complex on the western edge of Tundikhel.

Historians are vague about the



water supply in the residences of the nobility, but wells and water hauled from rivers, ponds, canals, and other sources were likely the primary sources. A small hiti north of Bagh Darbar, near today's Sundhara, may have supplied the palace. In 1823, Bhimsen Thapa had it enlarged, making it the last and largest state-built hiti in Kathmandu.

Even as Bhimsen Thapa was involved in palace intrigues and border conflicts, Britain was engineering pipelines. By the late 18th century, Sir Thomas Simpson had invented the bell-and-spigot joint, making long-distance pipes viable. Fluid dynamics dealing with pumps, pipes, and filters, was becoming a foundational discipline.

In Kathmandu, the scourge

continued. Cholera struck Kathmandu repeatedly, in 1862, 1867, 1872, 1874 and 1875. The 1872 epidemic, according to historian Tom Robertson, claimed between 200 and 250 lives a day. On average, cholera killed between 1,200 and 1,500 people annually in Kathmandu Valley, an enormous toll for its small population.

The summer of 1885 was especially calamitous: a cholera epidemic ravaged Kathmandu and its periphery from the beginning of June until late August.

The disease even breached the royal palace, reportedly killing 23 people, mostly young girls. The British Residency dispensary treated 909 patients, and as many as 10,000 people perished in a city of 50,000.

In November that year, Bir Shumsher seized power in a coup. He inherited not only premiership, but a Valley ridden with disease. Cholera was endemic, as were typhoid, smallpox, goitre, syphilis, and chronic dyspepsia. The Residency dispensary at Lainchaur was inadequate.

"In a poor country like ours, wealth means health," Bir Shumsher remarked in an unusually pragmatic admission that epidemics were not divine punishment, but structural afflictions of urban life. He soon pledged to expand health care.

In 1889, he opened Bir Hospital and staffed it with Indian doctors to treat cholera, typhoid, smallpox, and other prevalent illnesses.

PIPED WATER

Bir Shumsher also recognised the need for safe drinking water. Between 1866 and 1872, he had served as Nepal's ambassador in Calcutta, and he must have seen water mains already in operation there, and a filtration plant inaugurated in 1870.

Madras had installed such a system as early as 1800, Bombay constructed the Vihar and Tulsī reservoirs in the mid-19th century.

In Kathmandu, British Residency personalities such as George Gimlette must have urged Bir's government to quicken the construction of the hospital and water system, yet the archival traces of such exchanges still await historical scrutiny.

Protectionism will not protect

Infections and health inequalities have been reduced, but tariffs, cutting foreign aid, and protectionism will reverse progress

Winnie Byanyima and Michael Marmot

As the Global North turns inward, foreign aid has become an easy target. The decimation of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has dominated headlines, but the UK and many Europeans have also cut foreign-aid budgets.

Policymakers in these countries view this spending as a form of charity, and think that bolstering their economic and military might can deliver more benefits for more people.

This is short-sighted. It recalls the great-power ambitions of the 19th and early 20th centuries that culminated in two world wars. The global governance architecture that emerged from this unprecedented tragedy initially focused on responding to reconstruction and humanitarian needs, before turning to development.

Despite its flaws, this approach helped lift more than one billion people out of extreme poverty and build stable and thriving economies around the world.

The global health system built with funding from the US, the UK, and others reduced infectious disease rates and health inequalities, creating a safer and more secure world. Five years ago, this system was instrumental in detecting Covid-19, tracking its spread, and mobilising a global response.

But Covid-19 also illustrated how poorer countries and households are caught in an inequality-pandemic cycle. Contrary to claims that the Global North gives too much aid and receives too little in return, it is the Global South that is getting the bad deal.

After compiling and analysing hundreds





By the late 19th century, the British had developed a technological ecosystem for water supply, intakes, pipes, fittings, reservoirs, and trained engineers. Bir Shumsher appealed to the British Government in India for engineering assistance.

A British engineer named Mr Feigneur surveyed Kathmandu to prepare maps, and estimated the volume of water that could be brought from the Rudramati River.

In 1889, a more experienced engineer, Lockhart Matthew Sinclair arrived. He was a Scotsman

educated at Wellington College and the Royal Indian Engineering College, with prior experience in constructing waterworks in Jubbulpore and the Viceregal Palace in Shimla.

Appointed State Engineer of Nepal (1889–1892), Sinclair reviewed Feigneur's plans, updated them, and chose the Bishnumati River as the source of the city's drinking water.

Sinclair's design included a reservoir at Panipokhari, at 1,330m elevation and 30m above Tundikhel, thereby enabling gravity-fed distribution in pipes. With a capacity of 7,327m³, the reservoir could store nine days worth of water supply.

The system was designed to serve 70,000 residents through both private connections and public standpipes. The reservoir was a single-compartment tank with an arched brick roof covered in earth and turf. Its brick walls were bonded with lime mortar and aggregate, and its floor was dressed with fly stone.

Work on the valley's water supply began in 1888, three years after Bir Shumsher seized power. The following year, Bir Hospital and the Bir Water Works took shape. The project involved some 40km of imported cast-iron pipes, weighing 1.866 million kg and inscribed with the marks of Scottish foundries 'Ally and McLean' and 'Glasgow'.

Construction required 620,000 man-days of labour and cost over Rs600,000. Transport costs inflated prices: a load of cement costing Rs10 in Calcutta was worth Rs33 by the time it reached Kathmandu.

Bir Water Works was inaugurated in September 1891, six years after the cholera epidemic. Water flowed out of 131 taps, including eight in Lainchaur, six in the royal palace, 11 in the prime minister's palace, 16 around Tundikhel, 13 in Thapathali, seven in Thamel, and two in Naxal (pictured).

The system's designation, the term 'works', echoes the Chelsea, Calcutta, and Glasgow Water Works, underlining its industrial pedigree. Water was also supplied to Phora Darbar, Bir Shumsher's palace of music and dance whose fountains sprayed rose-scented water in a display of opulence.

The Bir Dhara Works was more than an engineering scheme: it was Nepal's first modern public-health intervention. Safer drinking water curbed waterborne disease, and the number of cholera outbreaks declined, but were not eliminated.

"Now we have water to fight cholera, and I believe cholera will no longer prevail. After four years of piped water, the benefits have been greater than expected," Bir Shumsher said in a proclamation.

Despite this, the prevalence of poor sanitation, open defecation, cramped housing, and malnutrition meant that typhoid, smallpox, and dyspepsia remained endemic.

The Bir Dhara system marked Kathmandu's transition from reliance on wells, rivers, springs, and hiti to piped water, operating for several decades and laying the foundation for the expansion of drinking water services across the country in the late 20th century.

Extensions followed in Patan under Chandra Shumsher, and Bhim Shumsher later added the Tri Bhim Dhara. Piped water systems were subsequently constructed in towns such as Kirtipur, Bhaktapur, Dhankuta, Pokhara, Dhulikhel, and Jajarkot which itself saw a deadly cholera outbreak in 2009.

CHOLERA METAPHOR

In 1933, Nepal's first water bureaucracy, the Pani Goswara, was established, formalising state involvement in urban water supply.

Yet even till the late 20th century, households continue to rely on a mix of sources, including public water networks, private vendors, rooftop storage tanks, borewells, wells, hiti, and household filtration.

The lack of reliable water supply places disproportionate financial, physical, and psychological burdens on low-income households, underscoring how decades of infrastructure

expansion have not translated into universal, reliable service, pointing to enduring challenges in governance, investment priorities, and regulation.

Bir Shumsher also attempted to introduce basic hygiene measures, such as pit latrines with squatting slabs. However, there is no record of these facilities being built in his palaces, later built palaces, or elsewhere.

Sanitation conditions remained poor for both the elite and the general population. Open defecation or the use of crude pit latrines without proper waste disposal was common. With no drainage or sewer systems, human waste accumulated near homes, contributing to the spread of waterborne diseases.

In 2019, Nepal declared itself 'open defecation free', a policy milestone, but this achievement masks the persistence of deeper problems. Urban areas generate some 867 million litres of wastewater daily, yet only 7% of it is treated before being discharged.

Sewage flows untreated into rivers and streams, spreading cholera, typhoid, dysentery, and other diseases, particularly among children and vulnerable communities. Safe disposal of faecal sludge continues to be a major struggle for many communities and local governments.

Besides Jajarkot, Godavari in Kathmandu Valley had a localised outbreak in 2024. This year, Birganj was struck by a cholera outbreak caused by a lethal combination of unreliable water supply, groundwater overpumping, poor drainage and hygiene, and unsafe waste disposal.

Nepal's peacekeepers deployed after the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 were blamed for spreading cholera that ultimately killed 30,000 people in the Caribbean nation.

The Bir Water Works was more than a reservoir and pipes. It was Nepal's first brush with modernity, mediated through engineering and haunted by cholera.

More than 134 years on, cholera remains a threat and a reminder of Nepal's challenges in water and sanitation governance.

The issue is not merely ensuring access to safe water but also building public trust that quality essential services can be delivered equitably, sustainably, and with resilience. ■

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against pandemics

of peer-reviewed studies, the Global Council on Inequality, AIDS and Pandemics found that poor and marginalised people struggle to access health services during disease outbreaks, leaving them more susceptible to infection, illness, and death. Viruses and other contagions prey on these vulnerabilities, turning outbreaks into epidemics, and epidemics into pandemics, which deepen inequalities and reinforce the cycle.

In the early days of Covid-19, this inequality-pandemic cycle was on display in Global North countries. White-collar professionals worked safely from home, thanks to high-speed internet and teleconferencing platforms, whereas small businesses and factories closed, throwing blue-collar workers into financial crisis. In these countries, the pandemic hit low-income and minority communities the hardest.

The unequal impact of the pandemic was also felt between countries. Vaccines were developed in record time – the result of a remarkable multilateral investment in strategic industries – but high-income

countries purchased most of them, and then refused to share excess doses with the developing world. This vaccine hoarding caused more than one million deaths and cost the global economy an estimated \$2.3 trillion.

The same pattern played out in the early response to the AIDS pandemic. At the end of the 20th century, effective antiretroviral drugs became available in the Global North. But AIDS continued to kill hundreds of thousands of people in the Global South, and especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2002, fewer than one million people living with HIV had access to antiretrovirals, whereas more than 30 million do today, expanding access to treatment has so far saved an estimated 26 million lives. And, before the recent foreign-aid cuts, the world could have achieved its goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

The decades-long journey to end AIDS has underscored the importance of investing in health systems, medical research, and vaccine and drug production. It has highlighted that people's living conditions determine their well-being.

GOING VIRAL

In 1996, Botswana, which was hit particularly hard by the AIDS pandemic, effectively added a year of secondary school to its public education system. This created a natural, population-level experiment on the effect of schooling on the risk of HIV infection.

An analysis of huge cohorts of young people who went to school under the old system and the new system found that each additional year of schooling reduced a young person's risk of HIV infection by 8.1%. This protective effect was strongest among women, whose risk of contracting HIV decreased by 11.6% for each additional year of school.

Building fairer societies leads to healthier populations that are better prepared to react to disease outbreaks and prevent pandemics. By contrast, defunding public education, slashing social safety nets, imposing tariffs, closing borders, cutting foreign aid, and disengaging from multilateral cooperation will widen inequalities, fuel political instability, accelerate economic migration, and create the conditions for viruses to thrive.

This is evident in Ukraine, where an over-

burdened health-care system has accelerated the spread of drug-resistant infections through war-torn communities. Meanwhile, outbreaks of Ebola, mpox, measles, and Marburg are on the rise, partly owing to globalisation and climate change.

Weakening the global health system will enable these outbreaks to fester and spread, taking lives, deepening inequalities, and destabilising societies. Experts are already warning that cuts to US programs (including those delivered by USAID) could lead to a 400% increase in AIDS deaths by 2029.

The abiding lesson of pandemics is that no one is safe until everyone is safe. Building walls and shutting out the world will not protect people. The only way to do that is by reducing inequalities and investing in the global health. Cooperation is the ultimate act of self-interest. ■

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Running for dear life

A Nepali banker in the US gives back to society by running marathons

Dirgha Raj Upadhyay
in Texas

Everyone in the world is running some kind of race. Some chase recognition. Some chase money. Others run simply to stay ahead of others. But there are some who run for others.

They are not trying to overtake anyone, they do not do it for fame, they are not getting paid to do it. But they run to pay to uplift those less privileged.

Bal Joshi, 41, is originally from Surkhet. His father was involved in the democratic movement during the days of absolute monarchy and he remembers frequent police searches of the house.

Joshi's family lived in the district headquarters before moving to a village when he was still very young. It was there that he started his primary education, walking four hours roundtrip every day between home and school. He ran most of the way, and without realising it he has been running ever since.

At the age of 15, Joshi moved to Nepalgunj to continue his education. He stayed with his uncles, but eventually began living on his own. The transition to city life was difficult, and he experienced significant economic hardship while trying to pursue his studies. There were times when he struggled to meet basic needs, and at one point he sold his calculator just to get by.

When he was 17, after hearing that his father was seriously ill, Joshi travelled to Gujarat to bring him back home. His father died soon after, and Joshi took on



responsibility for supporting his family. It was his mother who taught him that despite scarcity, life had to be lived with dignity.

Joshi started working at a newspaper at the age of 16 as a proofreader, and later became a journalist. During the civil war between the Maoists and the Nepal government, when children were being orphaned as a result of violence by both sides, Joshi joined the Sahara Group, and at 19, began managing an orphanage that took in conflict-affected children.

In Bajhang, after the army killed a man on suspicion of being

a Maoist, his wife jumped into the Seti River and ended her life. Their two children were taken into army custody. During the rescue process, Joshi met Sunaina Adhikari of the ICRC and back in Nepalgunj they decided to get married.

The conflict was still raging in western Nepal in 2005 when Joshi went to the United States. He initially took a job at a Subway outlet before moving on to a jewellery company, where he worked while supporting his family and continuing his studies.

In 2008, he moved to Texas and settled in Dallas, where he began

his banking career at Wells Fargo. He later joined Hancock Whitney Bank, where he is now a Senior Vice President.

MY RACE, MY PACE

It was his daughter who first encouraged him to start running, and later a colleague pushed him to take it more seriously. His first formal race was a half marathon in December 2021. Since then, Joshi has completed more than two dozen full marathons and over a dozen ultramarathons.

Last year, Joshi returned to Nepal to run the Everest Marathon, and raised \$42,000 using the One Step Foundation platform, supporting work in health care, child welfare and cultural preservation in Nepal and around the world.

In June this year, Joshi and his family climbed Kilimanjaro, raising \$19,000 for 80 HIV-affected orphaned children in Tanzania. During the Diwali festival he ran 220km in Nevada's Red Canyon and raised \$25,000 for cataract surgeries through the Ruit Foundation in Nepal. Joshi does not run competitions, and is not trying to break any records. His motto is: "My race, my pace."

Turning his childhood scarcity into helping others, he says: "We all share sunlight, rain, air, and soil, nothing is truly just your own. I grew up without shoes, and I am fortunate to be able to distribute shoes to those who walk barefoot."

We ask Bal Joshi what (and where) next? His answer: the World Marathon Challenge that will go around the world to run seven marathons on seven continents in seven days beginning in Antarctica at end-January. Joshi aims to run wearing the daura suruwal and Nepal's flag to show where he comes from, and how far in life he has come. 🇳🇵






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